

Representative

35th District

Serving Mason County
and parts of Grays Harbor,
Kitsap and Thurston counties

**Peggy
Johnson**



1998 Report to the Voters

Dear friends,

A new year has begun and so has a new legislative session. This year, our session, which began Jan. 12, is scheduled to last only 60 days. But we have much to accomplish within that short time period.

Priority issues in the session include what to do with an \$861 million surplus in the state's budget. I believe that it is important to set aside a large portion of this money in a rainy day fund in case of a downturn in the economy. However, I'll support additional money for effective reading and in-service programs and other educational issues. We should also examine the use of some of these funds to meet transportation needs without increasing the gas tax.

We will also look at reducing the amount you pay for your vehicle license tabs, further property tax reforms, tougher laws against drunk drivers, and taking a stronger stand against welfare fraud.

My priorities during this session include working to keep government from intruding into people's lives, providing a strong economy through lower taxes, and making sure that our children receive the best possible education in our schools. As a part of increasing the quality of education in our schools, this year I plan to introduce a reading initiative to improve the beginning reading skills of students in kindergarten through second grade. Also, I am continuing to work for relief for those who have suffered immensely from flooding in the Skokomish Valley. This newsletter outlines these issues and more.

I also appreciate the responses you sent me from our recent survey. The results of this survey are included for you to read.

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Again, thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve as your state representative. If you have any comments, thoughts, questions, ideas or concerns about state government, please write or contact my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peggy Johnson".

Peggy Johnson
Representative, 35th District



Johnson initiates improved reading standards

Recently, Gov. Gary Locke said he is making the improvement of student reading his priority. It has certainly been my priority for years.

The governor wants to match volunteers with children in first and second grades who are struggling to master reading skills. Some of the work will involve after-school hours. I'm glad the governor wants to improve reading standards. But I think we should first address these problems during school hours as well by offering a proven scientific-based reading program that will ensure the successful ability of our students to read.

An important part of that program would be the integration of phonemic awareness and phonics into the curriculum with "whole language." Phonics teaches reading through the sounds that groups of letters create. Whole language, which is now widely used in Washington's schools, teaches children to recognize word patterns.

In several Olympia elementary schools and many others across the state where phonics were integrated into early-level classrooms, reading scores of children jumped significantly. I believe that if we teach kids right the first time, we can eliminate the need for them having to come back for intensive assistance and training. If additional help is needed, we need to make sure that these volunteers use the proper components of phonics with whole language.

I have been in contact with reading/literacy experts from throughout the nation who have confirmed this approach works. Several have even come to Washington state to testify in front of the House Education Committee I chair. Their input as well as the assistance of others involved in early reading helped me to put together a ***Beginning Reading Initiative*** for the 1998 session.

Under the initiative, all language arts and reading programs must: (1) provide students with rich literature from which they may read or be read to; (2) provide direct and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness for K-1 students; (3) provide

instruction in decoding skills, letter-to-sound relationships, and word-attack skills; (4) develop instructional strategies to improve reading comprehension; and (5) frequently assess students' reading accuracy and fluency.

It will also require development of new certification requirements that calls for teachers to complete a

Rep. Peggy Johnson, R-Shelton, who has made improved reading by elementary schools a hallmark of her legislative career, raises a good point when she says that reading volunteers must be equipped with the proper materials. For Johnson, the proper materials are a mix of whole language and phonics.

The Olympian's "Our View," Dec. 17, 1997

course in research on beginning reading. The initiative also would require educational service districts to provide training opportunities for teachers in beginning reading research.

With these components and the support of the Legislature, the governor and the citizens of Washington state, I'm confident that we can reach the goal of eliminating illiteracy in our schools at an early age.



Rep. Peggy Johnson visits an elementary school classroom to gain firsthand knowledge about the curriculum.

Flooding

I wish I had better news to report about our efforts to persuade the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state Fish and Wildlife Department to help prevent river flooding. They have the ability to stop a great deal of the annual flooding that devastates property and lives in our state, but they have failed to act. When presented with the interests of property owners and citizens versus the interests of fish, they have chosen to protect fish instead of people.

The Skokomish River near Shelton is a prime example. It floods several times every year. With nearly every heavy rain this winter, it flooded, forcing people from their homes and property. Much of the flooding occurs on the Skokomish because the riverbed's capacity to hold water has been gradually reduced over the years from gravel buildup and excessive debris.

Two years ago, I was able to secure \$250,000 from the Legislature for a pilot project to remove this gravel and debris. Increasing the depth of the riverbed will allow more water to be carried out to Hood Canal and help to prevent the continual flooding suffered by the residents of the Skokomish Valley and the loss of property.

I deeply regret that two years later, the Corps and Fish and Wildlife still have not approved the permits necessary to complete this demonstration project. We had hoped to demonstrate to them and the state Department of Ecology that gravel and silt removal can save lives without sacrificing fish. I am convinced the two can be compatible.

We are now into another winter and it's too late for removing gravel. This summer, an engineering consultant hired by Mason County to study the river issued its report. The news was what we expected. The buildup of gravel and silt in the river is so bad that it is likely the river will continue to flood until the



Road closures, water over the roadway, and damage to homes and property are becoming all too common from flooding along the Skokomish River as agencies drag their feet in the permitting process.

riverbed permanently changes course. When it does, it could impact 18 homes, several businesses, two state fish hatcheries, the Skokomish Valley road, the Eells Hill Road (an escape route during flooding), and the Highway 101 bridge. We must prevent that.

I urge you to call Col. James M. Rigby, Northwest regional director of the Corps of Engineers and Bern Shanks, director of the Washington Fish and Wildlife Department. Ask them to expedite the permit process and allow this project to proceed so that lives and property can be saved. Col. Rigby's number is 206-764-3742. Bern Shanks can be reached at 360-902-2225.

Listen in on the Legislature



Any citizen who has a computer with a sound system and access to the Internet can listen to all deliberations of the Legislature **live as they are happening**. The deliberations are also stored for later access on demand. This is a free service provided by TVW, the statewide nonprofit television network which is the equivalent of C-SPAN at the national level. Just visit TVW's web site at <http://www.tvw.org>. The required software, RealAudio, is also free and can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.real.com>.

1998 Education Survey Results

I wish to thank all of you who took the time during the busy holiday season to fill out and return my education survey. The results were very enlightening and will help to guide me as I continue to work to improve our state's educational system. I also enjoyed reading the comments that many of you wrote to me, and I've tried to summarize them below along with the results of the survey.

1. Do you support charter schools?

Yes 55%, No 45% - answered by 96% of respondents

2. A. Do you support the concept of school vouchers?

Yes 55%, No 45% - answered by 100%

B. Should parents be allowed to "spend" their voucher at religious-based schools?

Yes 55%, No 45% - answered by 91%

3. A. Are your children getting now, or did your children get, a strong foundation in phonics when they learned to read in school?

Yes 68%, No 32% - answered by 89%

B. Are they good readers now?

Yes 80%, No 20% - answered by 87%

I received many comments from people whose children were good readers despite what they were taught in school. Many parents who commented said they supplemented their children's reading instruction, which also included phonics training at home. That is why they believe their

children are better readers. Overwhelmingly, those who thought phonics was taught in school indicated that their children are good readers.

4. A. Do you support yearly academic testing?

Yes 91%, No 9% - answered by 96%

Many who marked "no" in this question said they were opposed because of the cost, extra time involved, and stress of the testing.

B. Do you support nationally normed testing?

Yes 77%, No 23% - answered by 90%

Those who commented on this question were concerned the tests would be directed from the federal government.

5. Do you support social promotion, where children are promoted into the next grade without meeting the requirements of that grade?

Yes 2%, No 98% - answered by 92%

This was an overwhelming "no." Many who answered commented about how to proceed with those children who suffer from disabilities.

6. A. The Legislature is now working on bills to build an accountability system into reading programs and schools as a way to encourage academic improvement. Should some incentive be used to encourage academic success?

Yes 73%, No 27% - answered by 89%

B. Should some sort of consequences or down-side be enforced to discourage poor results?

Yes 63%, No 37% - answered by 84%

Our questions on accountability and consequences received comments about being too vague. I appreciate those remarks and upon review, I happen to agree.

7. Who should be accountable for academic success or failure?

(The figures show the percentage of those responding who chose the following as responsible:)

Elected school board members 68%
School superintendents 74%
School principals 75%
Classroom teachers 93%
Parents 94%
Students 92%

Most respondents indicated that all of these people are responsible. In fact, some ranked all six. Many who chose only teachers, parents and students ranked them in this order: parents, teachers, and students; or students, parents, and teachers. From the comments, it seems there is concern that parents should be more committed and involved in their child's education. Some also suggested that the Legislature be responsible. I agree that the Legislature needs to adequately fund education and hold districts responsible for academic results.